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Viewing cable 06KIEV1261, UKRAINE ELECTION 2006: WINNERS, LOSERS, TRENDS

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06KIEV1261	2006-03-30 14:51	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Kyiv

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SUBJECT: UKRAINE ELECTION 2006: WINNERS, LOSERS, TRENDS

REF: A. KIEV 1186

[1](#)B. 05 KIEV 4590

[1](#)C. KIEV 1081

Classified By: Ambassador, reason 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: While the results of Ukraine's March 26 parliamentary and local elections are not yet final, and negotiations to form a majority Rada coalition have not yet concluded, it is already clear that the elections highlighted a number of winners and losers, as well as trends in Ukraine's developing political landscape. Fundamentally, voting for the Verkhovna Rada reinforced the results of the ultimate Orange win in the 2004 presidential election with remarkably similar aggregate numbers: a majority of Ukrainians supported politicians/parties with overtly pro-Western, pro-reform orientations. The 2006 results also confirmed substantial shifts in the electorate from the 2002 Rada election. Besides Western-oriented, pro-reform Ukrainians, winners were, first and foremost, the Tymoshenko Bloc (BYuT), and secondarily Party of Regions and the Socialists, plus the Democratic Initiatives Polling firm and newly empowered locally elected authorities. The biggest losers were Rada Speaker Lytvyn as an individual and President Yushchenko's People's Union Our Ukraine as a party, secondarily Orange splinter forces like Kostenko's Ukrainian People's Party, Pora-Reforms and Order (Pora-PRP), and Yuri Karmazin's Bloc, as well as pro-Russian hard oppositionists Natalya Vitrenko, the SPDU(o), and the Communists. Comment: With only five parties in the Rada, and Vitrenko forced to reprise her role as a street-protest gadfly, the Ukrainian political scene may actually be more stable than many had feared leading up to the election, even though the same intra-Orange squabbling and Orange-Blue battles are almost guaranteed to continue in 2006 and beyond. End summary and comment.

The real winners: Ukraine, those who were on the Maidan

12. (C) While election tables from the 2006 Rada elections will show that Regions received a 32-percent plurality, the real winners of the March 26 election were Ukraine and the Ukrainian people themselves, which pulled off the most successful election among former Soviet republics outside of the Baltics, along with a majority of Ukrainians who had embraced a fundamentally pro-Western, pro-reform future in 2004 by voting for Yushchenko and then taking to the streets to prevent Yanukovych and the Kuchma regime elements from stealing victory. Despite incompetence and intra-Orange squabbling by the "Maidan" team in office, significantly lower growth figures, and disillusionment among ordinary Ukrainians in 2005, voters on March 26 delivered a remarkably similar percentage of votes to the parties who stood together on Maidan as they had to Yushchenko in 2004; just over half the voters voted for Orange parties or similarly oriented forces. In the December 2004 presidential re-vote, Yushchenko received 52% of the vote to Yanukovych's 44. (Note: With 99.95 percent of precincts reporting, the Orange forces of BYuT, Our Ukraine, and the Socialists will have 243 seats in the Rada, or 54 percent.)

Party winner: BYuT

13. (SBU) Based on expectations heading into the election, the runaway winner March 26 appears to be BYuT, which most pre-election polls for months had predicted would finish third with around 15% of the vote. In the competition for Maidan votes, BYuT bested Our Ukraine handily, some 22% to 14%; BYuT won pluralities in 13 central and western Ukrainian oblasts plus Kiev, compared to only three for Our Ukraine. BYuT also more than tripled its 2002 Rada vote (7.2%). Furthermore, BYuT built organizations in eastern and southern Ukraine, often running second to Regions; only BYuT and the Socialists can currently lay claim to being truly national parties. BYuT may have benefited from being out of government, tapping into voter discontent, as well as being led by the most charismatic of Ukrainian politicians, Yuliya Tymoshenko. But BYuT's effective grass roots organization and focused campaign tactics deserve a great deal of credit (ref A). That leaves BYuT and Tymoshenko herself well-positioned for future election cycles (2009 presidential, 2011 Rada).

Secondary winners: Regions and Socialists

14. (C) While many Western press stories immediately labeled Yanukovych and Party of Regions the "victors" in the March 26 vote based on their plurality, Regions' success is more nuanced. Regions did not aspire to be a national party in

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this election cycle; instead, as Yanukovych told us in early November 2005, Regions was running to protect its base in the east and south against the Communists and Vitrenko (ref B). Regions ran a well-financed, well-organized campaign, successfully consolidating that base, which had largely voted Communist in the 1998 and 2002 Rada elections. Regions won the nine oblasts plus Sevastopol that Yanukovych carried in 2004, securing slightly more than two-thirds of the support Yanukovych received then. Employing American consultants rather than Kremlin operatives to advise it on tactics and outreach to the media and Western interlocutors, Regions also partially rehabilitated an image tarnished by its attempts to steal the 2004 election. Regions' challenge looking forward will be to develop a strategy that appeals beyond its base.

15. (SBU) The Socialists (SPU) can also be considered a secondary winner in the 2006 cycle, even if they aspired to more than the 5.7% they received in their predicted fourth-place finish. The Socialists expanded a nationwide party structure and polled nearly evenly across the country, the only such Ukrainian political force to do so; they confirmed party leader Olexander Moroz's 2004 presidential first-round third-place support (5.8%), which pushed them past the Communists for the first time as Ukraine's leading "leftist" (in traditional European terms) force (ref B). While the Socialist niche is modest, it is well-defined, with a generally forward-looking, positive political agenda (its economic ideas, however, remain antediluvian). The SPU succeeded despite that fact that it being in power deprived it of the chance to tap into the protest vote, which had contributed to the SPU's 6.9% showing in the 2002 Rada elections.

Democratic Initiatives and the Exit Poll Consortium

16. (SBU) The widely respected Democratic Initiatives (DI) polling firm should also be considered one of the winners of the 2006 election cycle. Alone of Ukraine's major polling firms, DI captured the crucial dynamic of the campaign end game -- BYuT surging, and Our Ukraine slipping -- in its final published poll March 10 (note: Ukrainian law bans polls two weeks prior to elections). While the Institute of Social and Political Psychology of the Ukrainian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences showed BYuT ahead of Our Ukraine in its final March 10 poll, it did not have a track record of previous polls; all other polling firms showed Our Ukraine holding onto the 3-4% lead over BYuT it had enjoyed since mid-January. Democratic Initiatives combined with the Razumkov Center and the Kiev International Institute of Sociology to run an exit poll March 26 that accurately predicted the final results of the election, within their stated margin of error.

Local and regional elected officials

17. (SBU) The winner in the Kiev mayoral race, Leonid Chernovetsky, shocked everyone in besting not only incumbent Mayor Omelchenko but also ex-WBC heavyweight boxing champion Klychko, running on the Pora-PRP ticket. Chernovetsky ran a stealth campaign which clearly managed to secure a larger share of the anti-Omelchenko vote than Klychko.

18. (SBU) Finally, other winners in the March 26 elections, but which received little attention internationally, are the

oblast, town, and district councils that were elected along with mayors. Under constitutional reform and the delayed administrative reform, which will serve as a counterpart to changes in governance at the national level in Kiev, these provincial and local bodies will receive more resources and authority in the coming years. The elections under proportional representation clarified allegiances to voters previously faced with many unaffiliated local strongmen, improving accountability; the election also gives the councils a clear democratic mandate in negotiating with the center, including the unelected governors appointed by Kiev.

The Big Losers: Lytvyn and Our Ukraine

¶9. (SBU) The biggest individual loser of the 2006 election cycle was undoubtedly Rada Speaker Lytvyn, whose eponymous bloc failed to reach the 3-percent threshold for the Rada, leaving Lytvyn out in the cold. Lytvyn's bloc spent more money on advertising than any other party but Regions, according to official Central Election Commission (CEC) figures, and Lytvyn commanded 63 MPs in the current Rada, 15% overall. Lytvyn's campaign suffered from fatal flaws, however. It lacked any real organization beyond a collection of "names" at the national and local district level, many of whom were tainted with the Kuchmaist label (note: Lytvyn

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served as Kuchma's chief of staff prior to becoming Rada Speaker in 2002). The Lytvyn bloc had no real message for voters, beyond proposing itself and Lytvyn as a "referee" to reunite Ukraine between warring Orange and Blue factions. In the end, Lytvyn's vote total barely topped 600,000, the number of members his party claimed to have.

¶10. (C) The biggest party loser was Yushchenko's People's Union Our Ukraine (PUOU), the core of the Our Ukraine election bloc, which defied pre-election polls to slump into third place and below 14% on election day. xxxxxxxxxxxx had told us in late January that PUOU's organization was in complete shambles, would stagger to the election, and would need to rebuild from the ground up afterwards. Pre-election provincial visits confirmed xxxxxxxxxxxx gloomy assessment; Our Ukraine had no visible, effective organization outside of Lviv and several other western provinces, relying primarily on a slick, expensive TV campaign and Orange Revolution nostalgia. Voters did not respond.

¶11. (C) Our Ukraine's disappointing performance -- which has been characterized by many as a defeat for Yushchenko -- is also a reminder that Yushchenko's electorate in 2004 voted for him out of several motivations, not just in favor of Yushchenko. One early 2005 survey indicated that only 37 percent of those who said they had voted for Yushchenko had done so primarily because they supported Yushchenko personally; 34 percent did so primarily to protest Kuchmaism, and 29 percent did so primarily to defend their right to choose. PUOU's party leadership is currently dominated by the same unpopular Orange oligarchs -- Poroshenko, Zhvaniya, Tretyakov, Chervonenko -- who Yushchenko was forced to jettison in the September 2005 government shakeup, but who still form Yushchenko's "kitchen cabinet." Our Ukraine's poor organization for the 2006 election cycle does not bode well either for Yushchenko's presumed run for re-election in 2009 or for the next Rada cycle in 2011, unless it follows xxxxxxxxxxxx advice and rebuilds its organization.

The Orange Splinters - repeating the mistakes of the 1990s

¶12. (SBU) Two of the more organized party elements of the initial five-party Our Ukraine bloc that won a 23.6% plurality in the 2002 Rada elections, Yuri Kostenko's Ukrainian People's Party (UPP) and the Reforms and Order Party (PRP), decided to run independently from the Our Ukraine bloc in 2006, primarily because of disagreements with

Yushchenko and his entourage. In doing so, they repeated the mistake both made in 1998, when they ran separately and failed to reach the threshold. While both factions will enter a variety of city and provincial councils with their modified blocs (Kostenko-Plushch, Pora-PRP), their vote totals in the Rada race (1.9 and 1.5%, respectively), along with that of Our Ukraine MP Yuri Karmazin, who ran separately (0.7%), were lost.

Pro-Russian hardliner opposition - marginalized, for now

¶13. (SBU) Regions' heavily pro-Russian campaign rhetoric (pro-Russian language, anti-NATO, pro-Single Economic Space with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan) undercut the appeal of two parties who made the trio of issues the center of their campaigns: Natalya Vitrenko's People's Opposition Bloc (2.9%) and the Ne Tak! bloc centered around the SPDU(o) (1.0%), along with the Communists (3.7%). Vitrenko ran a vigorous street campaign, falling just short of the threshold. The SPDU(o), which received 6.3% of the 2002 Rada vote, bought extensive billboard ads throughout urban Ukraine but had no organization or street presence whatsoever. The 2006 results and disappearance from the political scene confirmed the loss that it and its leader Viktor Medvedchuk suffered in 2004 as the most reviled force behind the excesses of the Kuchma regime. While the Communists will have 21 seats in the next Rada sitting, their 2006 showing is but a shadow of the 20% they received in 2002. They ran a nearly invisible campaign; their dedicated electorate is dying off, and Regions has effectively taken the eastern and southern anti-Kiev protest vote that voted communist in 1998 and 2002.

¶14. (C) It would be a mistake to write off the pro-Russian marginalized opposition completely, however. Vitrenko has proven staying power on the streets of Ukraine, with many observers suspecting she receives financial support from Russia. If Regions ever transforms itself into a more Western-looking, reform-oriented force, part of its disgruntled "protest" electorate will likely turn elsewhere to voice its discontent. With the Communists dying and the SPDU(o) disappearing, Vitrenko may well finally make it into

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the Rada as the next protest vehicle.

¶15. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website at:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
Herbst